

# Interviews with theatre practitioners about texts for performance

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## Interviews with Theatre Practitioners about Texts for Performance

ABIGAIL ROKISON-WOODALL

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### INTERVIEW WITH TREVOR NUNN<sup>1</sup>

AR-W. When you are directing Shakespeare or another Renaissance play—for example, when you are doing *Volpone*—how do you usually put together a text? Do you use a pre-existing edition or do you put together something yourself?

TN. I am going to say immediately something that I am going to repeat many times, which is, that there is no rule of thumb. Again and again . . . it's horses for courses, and one approaches things differently. So . . . you've just mentioned *Volpone*. I'm doing a very particular production of *Volpone*.<sup>2</sup> I know that I'm doing something outrageous and possibly offensive to every purist, but I'm doing a completely modern-dress production of it, and therefore I have to edit the text quite severely. I would reckon that anybody in whatever style of production they're doing would discover that the sub-plot of Politic Would-be and Lady Would-be totally doesn't work. It may have meant something in 1605, but by 1610 it didn't mean anything. All the references are gone and it is irrecoverable. And it contains some of the worst comic dramaturgy one has ever, ever come across, and this in a play at the center of which is an absolute masterpiece, where the central scam is just fantastically brilliant and riveting, and one doesn't need to change a word of it. So . . . to take that as an extreme example, of course I am doing a very major edit. To begin with, I am doing a cut version, swingeingly cut in some places, and then I am collaborating with a writer—Ranjit Bolt, in this case—who is immensely accomplished in verse translation and doing work of this kind. And we're

having a wonderful time in doing something that sits somewhere between a cut and a re-write.

I mention that because I did something very similar on Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*.<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*—is it Shakespeare's? Is it Middleton's? And again, the issues of the play seemed to me to speak extraordinarily to the time that I was then living through—Thatcher's determination that the market was absolutely the only measure and as she notoriously said, "There is no such thing as society," and so on. And here was a very oddly misshapen play that appeared not to resolve properly, but that was overwhelmingly about those issues, that if the only valuation that people live by is a monetary one, then dreadful cruelties and selfishness occur. And it is to be railed against, and therefore, I did a heavily cut version, and this time the writer that I contacted was myself, and I adapted and interposed bits of text here and there, and what was fascinating . . . was that the critical fraternity arrived—it was a fraternity then—there was virtually no sorority—and they hugely, hugely approved of this attempt on the play, and said it was revelatory, and not one person said, "Although, Oy! Have you re-written a bit or have you put in some lines?" And therefore when you get into the more obscure territories, when you get to the plays that are so rarely done because there is something incomplete or problematic about them, then, that sort of textual intervention, I think, is understandable and forgivable.

AR-W. Absolutely. Are you preparing these texts from a particular edition or do you use an online text? What is your starting point?

TN. In that case I think I prepared my text from the Penguin edition, but I consulted other editions. I admit that I was using anything and everything of Shakespeare/Middleton that I could in service of a particular production. But those are extreme examples. We have started with the most extreme.

We live in such a changing world. The director traditionally was the person in the room to be approached by the acting company with questions such as "what does this mean" or "how do we interpret this?" or "what is this reference? I don't understand it," and so on. And, a great deal of directorial authority flowed from he or she being able to answer those questions satisfactorily, and that means a lot of preparatory work. That means having looked at least two versions of the text, but certainly having read every syllable of the Arden, where everything is going to be discussed at length and sometimes notes run to two pages and so on; so that the

director could be the wisdom in the room and the knowledge in the room, and therefore the adjudicator of anything that might be in dispute.

AR-W. And therefore you would give your actors a photocopy of the text that didn't have those notes on?

TN. I would invariably start with something like a Penguin text, or something equally as uncluttered on the page. Something where there might be notes but you have to turn to the back for them, so that there wasn't . . . the constant distraction of we are reading this bit of text but we are instantly getting into a debate because we've just read the Arden note, and there are five different possibilities here and the rehearsal schedule then collapses under the weight of it. So—simple, unmarked, unannotated rehearsal text was what I used to employ.

Now, of course, it is wonderful if you are doing a Shakespeare production at Stratford, for the Royal Shakespeare Company, because there is a very high expectation that people in the room are going to know all the terminology. They're going to know what one's talking about as one refers to a particular bit of scansion, or a caesura, or a bit of alliteration here, or how the movement into prose is all important . . . When one's doing a production with an ad hoc company—and this is most often the case at the National Theatre—you're doing the first Shakespeare that has been done in the building for eighteen months . . . then it becomes absolutely vital to begin with a two- or three-day Shakespeare workshop so that everybody in the company is on the same page with how we are going to discuss a text. Then, what I would commonly do . . . is to sit round a big table and we read and work through the text. Now, I would always give the actors a bare, unannotated, and un-noted text. I would have the same text in front of me, but also I would have the Arden to one side and maybe some other editions that I'd found some good things in on the other side, and every now and again, when it was important for people to understand what the possibilities were, then I would refer to the Arden, and I would say "these are the possibilities," so that a lot of early decision making could go on with the aid of Arden, but not with the constant confusion that everybody holding an Arden edition could cause. There is a different way of putting that, of course, which is, "he just wants to go on being the seat of knowledge, and doesn't want the actors to be able to shout." All of that has gone. Because, now you're in the rehearsal room and everyone has their iPhone or their iPad immediately available . . . and the moment somebody says, "What does that mean?",

the director is half way through a sentence when someone has said, “No, it says here . . .” . . . Of course, that extends to more than things that are by Shakespeare. Any reference in any play, and date, any bit of social history that you might be telling people about, somebody is on that machine, and is saying, “Well, that’s not the whole truth, because . . .” So, directorial authority is a diminishing ingredient these days, and rehearsal room democracy, which we all believe in, is very much on the increase. And soon, I believe directors will say, “Will everybody please leave their computers and iPhones at the door to be reclaimed at the end.”

AR-W. So, would you essentially always do the cut before rehearsals started?

TN. Absolutely. I think it is terribly important at the start of the casting process, or with a permanent company at the time of telling people what they’re playing, it is terribly important that you say, “But, before we even go into it, this section has gone, that speech is half the length,” because if that is visited upon somebody as a shock once they are in the rehearsal process, it can be genuinely very, very upsetting.

AR-W. With the texts you use, would you tamper with the punctuation? Say you take the Penguin or Arden text, would you do anything with those texts in advance of rehearsals?

TN. Again, I’m going to say that there is not rule of thumb. I mean, if there’s a considerable dispute about how something should be punctuated, because it really is going to change the meaning if there is a comma there, or if that phrase ends with a full stop, or we start a new phrase here, then of course it is terribly important to read as many versions of it as possible and to take a decision, and to say to the actors, “I’ve taken that decision and it’s what it’s going to be in this show, but you may well do this play in five years time and it will be different.”

AR-W. Peter Hall, for example, will often strip out what he considers to be extraneous punctuation—the sort of punctuation, which might make actors break up a verse line.<sup>4</sup>

TN. Peter certainly, because I’ve watched him work, didn’t do any such thing during the great days at Stratford. Texts very often involved the input of his close colleague John Barton, but it was that period of time when . . . I think contemporary Shakespeare acting got invented. I think

Peter inherited the notion that texts should be presented musically and sonorously and the sound of the verse was all-important; and gradually what Peter and the Company worked their way through to is wonderfully exemplified in the work that Ian Holm did, overwhelmingly as Henry V<sup>5</sup>. Ian Holm as Henry V was so absolutely opposite to what Laurence Olivier had been as Henry V . . . I'll never forget Ian Holm and Crispin's Day; Fluellen sitting by a wagon, once again reading the history of the wars, and young Henry absolutely desperate, knowing that there were too few of them, and that he was leading them into disaster, and how to stimulate the men. And he looked over Fluellen's shoulder and then whispered "Today's the Feast of Crispin," and then got an idea: "Oh, wow; on Crispin's Day, this thing will have happened, and we're going to go down in history, and old men forget, but he'll remember." And it was just brilliant; it was not recitation, it was these words have never been spoken before; these words are being coined right here and now in this situation. And because he's brilliant and because of the whole history of this Hal boy<sup>6</sup> that we've discovered, we believe that he is capable of that, and he has got the common touch, and he does know how to talk to all different kinds of people, and we're going to follow him to the North Pole. It was totally sensational, but it existed from moment to moment.

OK. Hold that thought, because that breakthrough became hugely the approach that I inherited and that we took even further when we began to do small scale Shakespeare at The Other Place, and we realized how stunningly conversational we could be; how you could whisper; how you actually would be caught out by the audience there if you weren't thinking. They could hear you think, or they could hear you not thinking. It was absolutely thrilling to be dealing with the texts in that way, and therefore punctuation became not a scholastic thing, not a literary thing; it was just to do with "where is the thought taking me?" Always, of course, to be balanced with "where is the pentameter?", "why is he using verse?", "what's the energy that has to be harnessed?" But Peter left, and went eventually to the National Theatre, and then came under the influence of *Free Shakespeare*—John Russell Brown—who said, "Pause at the end of every pentameter line—you have to mark the end of the line, and stop interpreting and just speak it. Just speak it, and observe the flow of the verse." And therefore Peter did *Hamlet* with Albert Finney . . . and so on,<sup>7</sup> and it was largely uninflected, and by then I thought that we were dealing with two completely different dramatists. And therefore punctuation seemed to be everything in what was happening at the National, almost as if there was a semi-colon at the end of every line. And when you do that

with the late plays, where the thought goes through the end of every line, and the punctuation is in the middle of every line, and almost never at the end of the line, and you keep breaking up the thought at the end of the line, I think you're doing absolutely the opposite of what Shakespeare was intending. Shakespeare was saying, "We know all about the pentameter, isn't it thrilling can we can play variations on it, and therefore, yes, by all means have your thought in the middle of the line, you've still got to be aware of the verse line, but don't keep marking it because you're doing the opposite of what I want to do."

AR-W. But then, if you're saying that that tradition of punctuation being about the actor's thought and not about literary punctuation, do you not sometimes find that with a literary edition, largely punctuated for modern readers, the punctuation is sometimes distracting? Are you encouraging actors to ignore that in favor of their own thought patterns?

TN. No rule of thumb. I know there have been occasions when I have said to an actor, "Look at this punctuation. That's terribly important. That comma there is vital." And there have been other occasions where I've said, "No, forget about that, and let's just make sense of this speech." So, it's a balance. Particularly, work at the RSC has to be a balance between scholarship and contemporary interpretation. There's a duty at Stratford; you're in the birthplace, and the highest possible standard of response to the text and honoring the text, and presenting that text, and getting it to live is vitally important. But the other thing you have to understand at Stratford is that it's a tourist center, it's an educational center, and therefore at any given performance you can be playing to people who've never seen that play before, or never read that play before. You can be playing to people who've never been in a theater before, and they can be sitting next to somebody who's written two books about it. So, you've got to find that balance.

AR-W. So, on the basis of that, a lot of the editions that exist are essentially academic editions. What is in them that is particularly helpful to a director? And what in them do you think it is useful for actors to have access to? Do you want to read a production history of something before you direct it? Do you want actors to have read a production history of a play before they perform in it? Or don't you mind?

TN. I'm fascinated by production history. Particularly if you get a very strong idea about a play and are thinking of doing it that way and then

you read that someone else did it exactly that way fifteen years ago in Germany. And indeed, any work that tells you about what Tyrone Guthrie got up to, you're likely to discover that he got there first anyway. I would definitely read that material. I'd be perfectly happy for actors to read such material, but the one thing that one wants to avoid is that a previous production history becomes any sort of constraint.

AR-W. What about source materials? A lot of academic editions include material on Shakespeare's sources, which, in some respects is very interesting, but in other ways can be misleading or distracting.

TN. Yes. Again—I'm sorry, this is terribly small-minded—but once again, I would love to be the seat of that knowledge, gathering the actors around and cherry picking and selecting the things that I think would inspire them and get them going, and not say, "Here is your research project, come back tomorrow all of you having read all of this material and then we'll have a debate about it." Because, I think you're ankle deep—you can't move.

AR-W. So, as a director that information is useful, but you don't necessarily think it is useful for actors. Of course, many of the characters are quite different in Shakespeare's play from how they are in the historical sources.

TN. Indeed, if you get into the Richard III debate, you're lost. If by the end of it you convince yourself that he was a really nice chap, you've blown it.

AR-W. What about material on textual variants? I know, that some actors want to make the decision for themselves about which textual variant to use. Is that something that you would always do before rehearsals start?

TN. Yes. If there are famous cruxes, then they're bound to come up in rehearsals; but, for the most part, I would think that it is sensible for a director of a particular production, with a particular interpretation, to make the decision ahead of time, so you're not communicating that it is all up for grabs.

AR-W. Do you think that it is useful for actors to know about variant texts? I'm struck that some actors don't always know what a quarto or folio is, for example.



TN. That's because they don't come to my two-day Shakespeare workshop, where, of course, they all learn about that within the first ten minutes.

AR-W. So, given that you do this wonderful two- or three-day Shakespeare workshop, if actors are doing a Shakespeare play and they're not working with someone like you who has that knowledge and is able to do that, do you think that that is what an introduction to an edition needs to do? What do actors need to know?

TN. It begins with the context and how we receive these texts, and then, of course, it goes very, very fundamentally to the iambic pentameter; the invention by Elizabethan dramatists of the blank verse line. In order to do that, I start with the Mystery plays, and people read from the Mystery plays, with a very tum-te-tum rhythm, and then there's a play written in fourteeners, which is even more doggerel-like somehow. So we look at the very beginnings of the blank verse line and how it gets more sophisticated, and if you're doing a late play, it's absolutely wonderful that you can take the workshop through so many periods in Shakespeare's own writing, as he begins to think differently about the relationship between verse and prose, and how flexible he wants the verse to be, and then ultimately how he doesn't want you to realize; he doesn't want you to mark it. What's terrific about the process is that you can make it genuinely a workshop so that all the actors get a chance to do something, and one can notate that and say, "Do it again but pick up on that a bit more," and get the others to understand that something stronger, or clearer or different has happened.

### INTERVIEW WITH GREGORY DORAN<sup>8</sup>

AR-W. When you are directing Shakespeare or another Renaissance play how do you usually put together a text? Do you use a pre-existing edition or do you put together something yourself?

GD. I guess it's dependent on the play. It's not entirely consistent as a process because the plays have different challenges. I do like to have all the editions that are available really.

What I do do, and I've done it for a long time now, is that I have a sense of my own productions running at about a slow 800 and trippingly 900 lines per hour. I guess when I took over the job, I knew that I didn't want directors to be in the position that I have often seen them here, of

getting to a final run-through and the production being four and a half hours and they haven't clocked it until then.

I remember that it came about when Charlie [Charles] Spencer reviewing a production about three or four years ago wrote: "There are certain directors in this place who think that productions of Shakespeare should go on way beyond half past ten;" and I thought, "That's an interesting one." We used to start at half past seven, so that's a three-hour show including a twenty-minute interval. If Shakespeare trippingly on the tongue is 900 lines an hour, then on a very cold mathematical equation that's 2,400 lines if you want two hours forty; but only seven of the plays are that long, so that means that you are going to be cutting as standard. I remember Jonathan Bate saying, "When have you ever come out of a Shakespeare play and wished that it was longer?"

I suppose, then, what has become a process and what I hope to make available to other directors, is that I do my cut first—I usually don't cut very much at all—and then I get my assistant director to go up to the archive and go through the prompt copies and see what other people have cut, and what is really interesting is the pattern of how cuts have happened. To some extent you can tell that there was a sort of Peter Hall cut, or a John Barton cut, and then Terry Hands would do his own cut, but Trevor would do almost exactly the same cut, and Adrian Noble would do a mixture, and then Michael Boyd would resolutely do his own cut. What I found really interesting about doing *Antony and Cleopatra*,<sup>9</sup> was discovering that there were some lines that had never been spoken on the Royal Shakespeare Company stage, and thinking, "I'll put them in then." And I remember putting one line in in particular about the consuls Hirtius and Pansa, and it lasting about three previews.

AR-W. Obviously you've got to make certain decisions before rehearsals begin about cuts, partly for the sake of the actors, because it's pretty rotten to sign up to play something and then find out you're playing half of it.

GD. Yes. You're absolutely right. Cutting is going to be one of the major things that you do before rehearsals. There's cutting, casting and designing it.

I produce my cut, which I know is going to run pretty much to time, and then I say, "This is going to get us in pretty much on time. You can of course put back any line you'd like but show me the line you want to cut to replace it." It's a little negotiation. I remember when we were doing *Hamlet*,<sup>10</sup> Patrick Stewart is one of those actors who is quite happy

to cut, and indeed finds it a rather invigorating process, and so various actors were saying, "Can I bank some of the lines that Patrick has cut?" Which wasn't allowed. But it's a very fluid process.

I tend to print out the script, once I've done the cut, only because I think that if there are struck-through lines on the page then they're tempting, but I am absolutely open about it. I'm not trying to pretend that that line was never there, because we have all the editions open on the table.

AR-W. And presumably it's the same with the major textual variants—like whether or not you are going to include the trial scene in *Lear*—but what about smaller textual variants? Is that something that is negotiable in rehearsals?

GD. Oh, yes. In terms of individual words and variants. I love the fact that actors can comb through things. I comb through them.

A key one for me was Jasper [Britton] when we did *The Taming of the Shrew*,<sup>11</sup> getting to the end of the first encounter between Kate and Petruccio, and we charted the relationship through the use of thee and you forms, and that was absolutely fascinating. It made complete sense until the last few beats. He suddenly says, "For I am he am born to tame you Kate," and you think, "Why has he gone back to the you form now?" And then one day Jasper came in with his Folio text and said, "Look." And the entry of Baptista and Gremio and co. in all the editions that we had came at the end of Petruccio's speech, and in the Folio it came before these lines.

AR-W. That is definitely something I would like to think about in terms of editions. Whether it is possible to indicate, in cases where different texts suggest different entrances, "At some point during these lines the characters enter."

GD. It made me alert to the fact that editors are editing for readers and not for actors. I'm not a purist at all in terms of punctuation, etc. I think that it is sometimes interesting where punctuation comes, but there's a lot of nonsense talked about it.

AR-W. Do you ever change words if their meaning has changed?

GD. It's interesting. I've found myself rather reluctant. I think, for example, that Nick Hytner changes words too much. I think, "I know what

that word means." Even if I didn't . . . I remember that at school I had the delightful experience of playing Lady Macbeth. And two other productions happened to arrive at the exact same time. One was the Polanski film and then in the afternoon there was the Everyman production which had toured; and I remember in that production, Lady Macbeth, instead of saying, "Let no compunctious visitings of nature shake my foul purpose," said, "Let no horrid visitings of nature shake my foul purpose," and I was physically offended by it. And I remember they had a talk afterwards, and I was so fucking pretentious I said, "Why did you change compunctious to horrid?"; and she said, "Because nobody understands the word compunctious. Tell me what compunctious means;" and I said, "It's not my job to tell you what it means, it's your job to convey it to me." To me, "compunctious," even if you don't know what it means, has such a sort of punch. It's syllabically interesting, and consonantly shocking and horrid just don't do it! As a rule the text that we start with doesn't have any words changed. We might change them in rehearsal, but I tend not to open that floodgate, because you can change the meaning but you might lose the poetry. Then I find myself looking at the Jacobethan repertoire,<sup>12</sup> and realizing that my colleagues are much more ready to adapt, sometimes freely adapt, the Jacobeans, partly because, of course, that language has not been current for the last four hundred years, whereas Shakespeare has been part of our language.

Peter Hall, when he was doing *All's Well that Ends Well*, said, "This is the last generation that will do Shakespeare as it is written," and I thought, "That's shocking. I don't want that to be the case." We just need to attune people's ears to it. I have a similar anxiety about classical references, because I've noticed more and more directors cutting them out.

AR-W. You have all these editions in the rehearsal room. What are the current pros and cons of existing editions for the rehearsal room?

GD. There are just too many footnotes in the Arden, and they're just too literary. I don't need to know which editors changed what when I'm rehearsing it. Normally now we print out a text without notes, but some actors abandon a text that size (A4) because they prefer a book. The RSC one has the notes at the bottom of the page, so you don't have to flick to the back, which makes it quite quick, unlike the Penguin.

AR-W - In terms of the introductions to scholarly edited texts. As a director, do you want to read a production history and the source materials?

G D. I do. But I don't want to read the plucked version of a source that is popped into the appendix. I'm sufficiently obsessive to want to get the original. I did a student production of *Romeo and Juliet* and I remember reading the Arthur Brooke poem, and what it made me understand is that what is fascinating is what Shakespeare has changed. . . . We, last week, did a reading. I've had a translation of *Gl'ingannati*, the source for *Twelfth Night* done, to do a series of plays for what we will call "The Inspired Season." And *Gl'ingannati* is really interesting for the choices that he makes. And when we did *Taming of the Shrew* we had the understudy company act out for us *The Taming of a Shrew*. If you really wanted to know what an absolutely clichéd figured of a shrew might be—at one point she virtually says, "Shut up or I'll bite your face off." It was interesting to see how Shakespeare has found psychological ignition points for elements of Kate's behavior. I do like to read the source material.

AR-W. Do you think that it can be a problem with the history plays where you have real people who aren't like the characters Shakespeare created?

GD. Yes, I do think perhaps with the histories it is more difficult. Actors come in with interesting facts, but not about the character. And, of course, Shakespeare is not writing historical documentary.

AR. Most actors have suggested that they don't want a production history.

GD. That's interesting, and nor do some directors. I believe that theater is partly about theater practice, and the passing on of that theater practice, and sometimes you have to get far away from that theater practice. Michael Boyd removed past production photographs from the programs. I feel more Janus-like about looking forward and looking back, but he felt that one of the problems of doing Shakespeare in Stratford was the weight of precedent. I find that it is a weight, but it is both intimidating and inspiring and you've just got to be grown up about it. I like reading about past productions. I like seeing what other directors have done, because sometimes it gives you an insight into something that you had never thought of.

### INTERVIEW WITH LUCY BAILEY<sup>13</sup>

AR-W. When you are directing Shakespeare or another Renaissance play how do you usually put together a text? Do you use a pre-existing edition or do you put together something yourself?

LB. It varies depending on the play and how much of the play I need to restructure. So, some of the plays that I've done like *Taming of the Shrew* and *Titus Andronicus* and *Timon of Athens*<sup>14</sup> I was quite hands on about how I needed to rearrange it, or reassign lines, so I would present the actors with my own script. It helps to access it in a short rehearsal period, particularly if you're amalgamating characters, like in *Titus Andronicus*, where I took all the lines given to nobody—"a Roman"—and I made a part out of it called Bacchus—a drunkard, so he had his own name. I've done that quite often—created a character.

AR-W. When you are preparing a script like that are you preparing it from a particular edition or do you use an online text? What is your starting point?

LB. I do everything. I'm greedy to read the play, so I'll probably start with whatever edition I've got on my shelf, or an online one if I haven't. I tend to go for as many editions as I can get—the Arden, the Bate (RSC),<sup>15</sup> and the Oxford. Sometimes I might even go for a student one in order to give me a cheat manual—accessing very simple translations just to unlock certain aspects of the plays. With the Arden I tend to put it to one side and treat it as academic preparation. That's not to dismiss it; it is just to say that it is more detailed backup work to give myself a deeper understanding. The Bate is always very clear, and less punctuated than the Arden. I tend to find the older Ardens over-punctuated and I don't like that. I like a simpler text that gives you more choices.

AR-W. Some directors remove punctuation from their texts before giving them to actors. Do you ever do that?

LB. Yes, because I end up writing the whole bloody script out sometimes. It gets too complicated and sometimes none of the editions seems quite right for what I want to do, so as an exercise I start to write out the whole play, which is really arduous. When I do that I often take an online one, and I take out most of the punctuation, like Giles Block does.<sup>16</sup> I use it as a teaching process, and I get more and more familiar with the text. And I start to look at the Folio and the quartos and what choices there are. I've got more fussy as I've got more experienced, and I often put in the margin for the actor the alternate Folio or quarto word so that they can choose. If I haven't made the choice already I give them the choice.

AR-W. With a text like *King Lear*, which you directed recently,<sup>17</sup> the differences are huge and sometimes structural. Presumably you have to make decisions about which texts you're using when, before rehearsals start.

LB. Yes.

AR-W. But when there are smaller textual variants are you happy for actors to choose?

LB. Yes, definitely. In *King Lear* I had a very particular concept, which was based on the casting—a 56-year-old King Lear. I set it in 60s Kray's land, knowing that my actor could really do that, and be quite frightening. It was a very bold approach and it paid off. But it meant that I tailored lots of things to David [Haig], which had huge implications, in terms of cutting; also, his own trajectory and his own needs as an actor. We worked on certain cuts together, and we also worked across texts together. I would send him my text with the choices and he would come back with what worked for him. Most of the things we agreed on. You find that it you've got somebody you're working well with.

AR-W. Do you ever use a published edition in the rehearsal room?

LB. I think it varies. For *Taming and Shrew* I always had the Bate (RSC) in my hand. The actors had other scripts, so we were working across scripts, which was quite irritating. With *Winter's Tale*<sup>18</sup> and *King Lear* and *Titus* I did my own script. It has varied. When I did *A Midsummer Night's Dream*<sup>19</sup> many years ago for the RSC, I had very little experience, so I was working on much more of an instinctive level. The text was the text and I just got on with it.

AR-W - What are the pros and cons of current editions for actors in the rehearsal room?

LB. For an actor they want a simple key. Most scripts get reprinted for actors, without the notes, which is a bit mad. So the director becomes this all-powerful person. Whenever you get to a difficult word you can say, "Well I think it means this," because you've got the glossing. I do a lot of paraphrasing as an exercise in rehearsal. One of the first things we do is to paraphrase, so it's very unfair. I think that it would be great for actors to have a copy that includes a glossary. I don't think that an actor wants a clean script. I think they really want the keys, and some of those



little tidbits of information that tell you why something was written. So, there's the glossary, and occasionally it's good to know the textual choices, and occasionally a contextual note that makes something clear.

Occasionally when I was working with Duggie [Douglas] Hodge,<sup>20</sup> he would get very excited by having gone back to an earlier text and going, "I've discovered that the punctuation is different," or the words. He would get very excited about the use of different words.

AR-W. Do you always cut a text before rehearsals begin?

LB. I've learnt that you should. I've learnt to my peril. You always regret not doing enough cuts before. And actors will fight cuts, but if you have done it before, you can be really clear.

AR-W. Do you also change words if their meaning has changed and you think an audience might not understand something?

LB. Yes, I do. I can't bear it if you really can't understand a word. But, when I worked with John McEnery in *As You Like It* at the Globe<sup>21</sup>—my first Shakespeare at the Globe—he and I made a decision about Jaques that we were not going to cut. We were going to insist on meaning, and he and I spent hours on meaning, to the point where we felt that the audience got it. With a great actor like that you can do it. Other times, I have gone the other way and thought, "I don't understand that however many times you say it. If we can just change one word it will let me in." It is really important to let people in, without patronizing them. There's a real judgement.

With cuts I find them difficult if they're not about where I'm going with the play.

You're looking for verbiage. I tend also to look at other people's cuts. I will go to the RSC and say, "please send me some examples," which they will, or with a director, I will say, "I know that you've done this play, will you send me your personal cuts," so you are up front with it. And then you can see, "That's such a clever cut," or not. It's a shorthand.

AR-W. What of the material that usually appears in the introduction to an edited text is useful to you? For example, do you want to read a production history of the play before you do it?

LB. Yes. I do. You're not looking to do the same, but you are looking for a kind of debate, and when you hear another director talk about the play,



I find that really great. You might think, “Do you really think that? I don’t think that,” or, “How wonderful, I hadn’t gone down that line and that does help me.” I suppose that for some people it might be a bit of a cheat sheet, but I think that for anyone who’s worth their salt it’s not really—it’s a debating shop. It allows us to feel that there’s an exchange of ideas going on. In doing your production you’re not in isolation.

AR-W. What about source materials?

LB. Yes. It’s great to read them. I love that. It’s an excavation. You see where Shakespeare has taken his choices from and why, and I think that’s vital. Sometimes the source material in an edition is too controlled by the editor. You want to access the whole of it, not just be given a tiny bit of it. I can see though that you can’t really include the whole of a text.

AR-W. What about historical context? Even if you are doing a modern dress production, is historical context still important.

LB. Yes, I think even more so if you’re doing a modern dress production. I think you have to find out what’s topical, and current; what’s behind the play, and what it’s talking about to Elizabethan contemporary society. And, of course, that resonates with our society, but you have to understand their anxieties. With *Timon* we didn’t do a modern dress production, but we did a very free interpretation in terms of where we set it. But I spent a lot of time understanding what Shakespeare and Middleton were trying to pin down about their own society, and that accorded with ours in the most frightening way. It just gives you enormous confidence with what you’re saying, and then to update it isn’t so glib. Updating can be sickeningly irrelevant.

AR-W. What about variant texts?

LB. Yes. I can’t say I have always done that with every single play. You have to feel as a director as empowered as possible. I know that’s difficult for the editor because you can’t include every single thing or it becomes overwhelming. A director likes to feel that they’ve understood the choices.

AR-W. And do you think that these same things are useful to actors?

LB. I think actors want to know about historical context. They're very bright, and they don't want to be denied accessing a way of playing a character. Whether they want performance history, I doubt.

### INTERVIEW WITH SIMON RUSSELL BEALE<sup>22</sup>

AR-W. What sort of text are you most accustomed to being given for a production? Do you choose your own, or get a photocopy or a typed out text without editorial notes?

SRB. On the first day of rehearsal we tend to get a photocopy of the text—at the National anyway. It is a copy without editorial notes. How you get there depends. And I think if you were playing a leading part, most directors would consult you. I know that Nick [Nicholas Hytner] with Rory [Kinnear], spent a week at the studio going through *Hamlet*,<sup>23</sup> and I certainly spent three days with Nick going through *Timon of Athens*.<sup>24</sup> With *Lear*, Sam [Mendes] and I would actually do most of it on the floor.<sup>25</sup> There's a lot of negotiation with your leading actors. They don't have to be leading actors, but if you're playing Hamlet you've got a right to be consulted. I remember for *Timon*, we had an actor called Nick Sampson. It was just me and Nick Hytner and Nick Sampson and Ben Power [dramaturge] in a room going through *Timon*. So, in other words it was someone who was playing not a big part in the production, but somebody who the director presumably trusts. It's much more collaborative than it was say fifty years ago—even thirty years ago. But by the time you get to the rehearsal room on the first day, most people are presented with a text that has been agreed by a group of people. With *Hamlet*<sup>26</sup> it was a bit different because John Caird made the decision that the whole company would spend two weeks of a long rehearsal period, going through the whole play. It would have been the second quarto, I suspect, as a basic text, and then we would debate things between us, so we all ended up happy with various cuts. There are also various things we do to a text. Sam [Mendes] is always very keen on altering fifth acts—the battle scenes in *Richard III* he altered substantially.<sup>27</sup> With *Timon*, that was a whole different kettle of fish—how you make a feasible, dramatic text—but with *Hamlet*, I remember, even before it was cut we knew that we weren't going to use Fortinbras. That was a directorial decision that I agreed with, and therefore I knew that I was going to be looking at the text with the assumption that Fortinbras wouldn't be there. I think it's a negotiation, but the important thing is that the whole cast gets a single copy and it's very clearly printed and has no notes.

AR-W. Do you consult multiple editions?

SRB. We consult multiple editions all the time, and they're there for the whole period of rehearsal. So, normally there would be a pile of texts, and I think that's now regarded as absolutely normal. So, an actor can, if he or she can be bothered to read alternatives, make a suggestion about another text and normally directors will consider it.

AR-W. What are the pros and cons of current editions for actors in the rehearsal room?

SRB. I have a sentimental attachment to Arden (particularly Arden 2) because I like a book with the whole lot of it in. I find the Penguin, with the notes at the end rather irritating—it's simply not practical. You're slightly talking to the wrong person here, because I generally try to learn the whole part before I get on the floor, precisely because of that. I don't want a book where I have to flick over pages. Arden at least has the benefit of everything being on the same page. I suppose that the cons of Arden are that, for example, Ferdinand's soliloquy in *The Tempest* has one line and then four pages of notes.<sup>28</sup>

AR-W. Are you used to directors cutting the text before it is given to you, or consulting you about cuts?

SRB. Again, that's a negotiation. That applies to modern plays as well . . . It's not to do with vanity; it's to do with what you see as a fair representation of the person you are playing. We get into really complicated areas to do with contract—you're contracted to do a certain amount, and then some of that goes—that happens a lot with new plays. That's to do with trust and, I hate to say it, but it's to do with status in the rehearsal room. There are certain people who can say to the director—'I think this is essential'—and the director will often say 'Yes, sorry'. There are other people who, I hate to say it, can't do that, or don't have the guts to.

AR-W. What is your view on the punctuation of edited texts?

SRB. I've never really thought about punctuation. I know that various problems exist.

AR-W. Some directors strip a lot of the punctuation out of a text before giving it to actors because they think that this stops actors from breaking up the metrical line.

SRB. I remember Trevor [Nunn] doing a big workshop day on verse when he had a company here, at the National, where he gave me a speech of Angelo's, "What's this, what's this." You know my thoughts about this. If you have Leontes or Angelo on stage, in trouble, and you're more concerned about observing the verse form and its incredibly disjointed state, and the audience goes away going, "My God, that man's in trouble but I didn't understand a word he said," that seems to me to be less productive than saying, "I understood every word that man said," even if it wasn't precisely metrical. So, I'm a bit behind the times on this.

AR-W. I don't think that you are. Doesn't Nick Hytner believe that the sense is more important than anything else, even to the point of changing words so that an audience can better understand?

SRB. Exactly. Which both Nick and I feel tentative about. And it's a question of taste too. I just don't see the point in having twenty lines where you think, "I have no idea what this person is talking about."

AR-W. Do you want to read a production history of the play before you do it?

SRB. Not really, no. I think that is a no-no, isn't it? I only came to theater history very late, and it's fascinating. Donald Sinden's Malvolio and the sun dial.<sup>29</sup> It's such a delight to read about that moment; but, I could never repeat it, and I could never think of something as good as that. It was an amazing comic moment. I don't watch films of the plays either.

AR-W. What about source materials?

SRB. I actually am interested in source materials, but I don't think most people are. It can be fascinating to know what changes Shakespeare made to the sources, and to think why. With *Othello*, for example, there are lots of interesting things in Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*. Iago, for a start, is extremely handsome and very sexy. I think that's interesting because most Iagos aren't, and I certainly wasn't. He is married and has a daughter, and the daughter is on Desdemona's knee playing with her handkerchief. So Iago and Emilia's daughter is associated with the loss of the handkerchief. So, Iago is a sexual threat and confident and Machievellian, and he has a marriage that might not be successful but is certainly productive, and these things are tied in with the plot. What Shakespeare must have done is to think, "I don't want the daughter." I suppose Iago and Emilia could

have children, but it is never mentioned. I think it is a deliberate decision to say, "They don't have children," and also, "I'm going to get rid of the fact that he's handsome." He is also in love with Desdemona in the Cinthio, which in the play, of course, is one of the many, many questions. So Shakespeare is doing a hugely creative rethink of this character and making a figure of extraordinary complexity out of a figure who is functional and I think that as an actor you think, "Ok, so that's what he was interested in."

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Interview conducted on 12 September 2014 in London. The interview has been edited.

<sup>2</sup>Swan Theatre, opening night: 9 July 2015.

<sup>3</sup>Young Vic, opening night: 28 Feb 1991.

<sup>4</sup>See Abigail Rokison (10).

<sup>5</sup>Royal Shakespeare Theatre, opening night: 3 June 1964.

<sup>6</sup>The production of *Henry V* was part of a Histories Cycle at the RSC. Holm had also played Hal in *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*.

<sup>7</sup>Old Vic, opening night: 10 December 1975.

<sup>8</sup>Interview conducted on 12 June 2015 in Stratford-upon-Avon. The interview has been edited.

<sup>9</sup>Royal Shakespeare Theatre, opening night: 29 April 2006.

<sup>10</sup>Royal Shakespeare Theatre, opening night: 5 August 2008.

<sup>11</sup>Swan Theatre, opening night: 9 April 2003.

<sup>12</sup>The Elizabethan and Jacobean repertoire.

<sup>13</sup>Interview conducted on 11 May 2015 in London. The interview has been edited.

<sup>14</sup>*Taming of the Shrew*, RSC, opening night: 25 January 2012; *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, opening nights: 30 May 2006 and 1 May 2014; *Timon of Athens*, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, opening night: 6 August 2008.

<sup>15</sup>RSC edition, edited by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen.

<sup>16</sup>Giles Block is Globe Associate: Text at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre.

<sup>17</sup>Theatre Royal, Bath, opening night: 31 July 2013 (with David Haig as King Lear).

<sup>18</sup>Royal Shakespeare Theatre, opening night: 30 January 2013.

<sup>19</sup>Manchester Royal Exchange, opening night: 11 March 2002.

<sup>20</sup>Hodge played Titus Andronicus in Bailey's production of *Titus Andronicus* at Shakespeare's Globe in 2006.

<sup>21</sup>Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, opening night: 20 May 1998 (with John McEnery as Jaques).

<sup>22</sup>Interview conducted on 6 June 2015 in London. This interview has been edited.

<sup>23</sup>National Theatre, opening night: 7 October 2010 (dir. Nicholas Hytner, with Rory Kinnear as Hamlet).

<sup>24</sup>National Theatre, opening night: 17 July 2012 (with Simon Russell Beale as Timon).

<sup>25</sup>National Theatre, opening night: 23 January 2014 (dir. Sam Mendes, with Simon Russell Beale as Lear).

<sup>26</sup>National Theatre, opening night: 15 July 2000 (with Simon Russell Beale as Hamlet).

<sup>27</sup>*Richard III*, dir. Sam Mendes, The Other Place, opening night: 11 August 1992, with Simon Russell Beale as Richard III.

<sup>28</sup>*The Tempest*, ed. Frank Kermode. Ferdinand's first speech (3.1.1–15) runs over three pages, with one page entirely devoted to notes.

<sup>29</sup>Donald Sinden played Malvolio in John Barton's production of *Twelfth Night* at the RSC in 1969. Sinden's Malvolio entered in 3.4., looked at the sundial and at his pocket watch, the two of which differed, and corrected the sundial.

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